On Friday, June 19th, railroad workers are encouraged to wear black to work as a sign of remembrance and recognition of our fallen brothers and sisters who were killed on the job over the course of the previous year. Sponsored by Railroad Workers United, each year the event focuses on a specific theme. Because of the large number of contract and non-union railroaders who were killed the past 12 months, this year’s Railroad Workers Memorial Day will focus on these workers and their plight.

Those non-union and contract workers killed this past year include: a contract worker involved in track work on Canadian Pacific near Forreston, IL; a train crew member of The Western Group, while operating a train near Roswell, NM on former BNSF territory; two employees of a contract railcar servicing outfit while performing service in Omaha, NE; a trainman spotting cars at an industry in Pine Bluff, AR; a contract worker for BNSF unloading rail cars in Kansas City, KS; a conductor making a switch move for Alabama Warrior Railway in Birmingham, AL.

Throughout our history, railroad workers have organized into unions to improve our wages, benefits and working conditions. Improved safety has always been a major reason for railroad workers to organize. Rail carriers – like other corporations - have historically resisted employee organization and the associated demands for better wages, benefits and working conditions.

In recent decades, rail carriers – once again like many modern corporations – have devised a means by which they can circumvent the largely unionized railroad workforce. It is known as “contracting out”. Rather than keep the work in-house, the big rail carriers have opted to farm out all types of jobs to smaller, mostly non-union outfits that all-too-often offer their employees low pay, few benefits, and miserable unsafe working conditions.

Class I railroads have contracted out everything from locomotive servicing to track construction, weed spraying and brush trimming to car repair, rail inspection and train crew transport. It is hard to say just how many jobs have been contracted in this manner, in the tens of thousands perhaps. This is bad news for all railroad workers and it is an issue of grave concern to the future of our industry, our working conditions, pension, and crucially, our safety and health.

The railroad industry proudly touts its safety programs, the declining numbers of on-the-job "reportable" injuries and so forth. However, this disingenuous posturing ignores the fact that
the railroad is engaged in contracting out work to outfits that often have poor safety standards and records. These contract companies employ workers – usually on the railroad’s property -- to perform the exact same work that was once performed by railroad employees. But now cynically, the railroad takes no responsibility for these workers because they are no longer in the railroad’s direct employ. The rail carriers’ attitude towards these workers is that they are not responsible for their health and safety – even though they are on our property, performing the same essential work that was once done by our employees, working in safety sensitive jobs, and making profit for the company’s bottom line. Also, the carriers know that many accidents and injuries of contract workers do not have to be reported to the FRA.

Just because the people servicing the locomotives, cutting the brush or driving the train crews are no longer directly employed by the railroad does not mean that union railroaders should turn our backs on them. Not only are they our fellow workers who work right alongside us, but our very ability to thrive and prosper is intrinsically linked to theirs! The rail labor unions must resist this “de-unionization” of these jobs, and begin to aggressively organize these contract workers.

Therefore, RWU will continue to reach out and support the efforts of all contract railroad workers to organize into a union, and we hope that all railroad union members understand that our safety is directly linked to the safety of contract workers.

**Contract and Non-Union Railroaders Killed in the Line of Duty June 2014 to June 2015**

The fatalities listed below are the ones that Railroad Workers United was made aware of. It is hard to say if others – and how many – might have been killed this past year. These workers often work for small firms and are usually not unionized. As such, when one of them suffers an industrial accident, the news of his/her death is not necessarily well broadcast.

**April 30, 2015 - Forreston, IL** - An R.J. Corman Railroad Group employee was killed Thursday in a railroad work accident in Illinois, authorities said. James C. Campbell, 20, of Prestonsburg, KY suffered a fatal head injury while working along Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks near the village of Forreston. Campbell was in an all-terrain vehicle near a spot where other workers were using a large magnetic boom to pick up metal railroad spikes along the tracks, the sheriff’s department said. The boom somehow went out of control and spun, striking the four-seat vehicle, the sheriff’s department said. Officials say Campbell was ejected from the vehicle and injured his head. He was doing private contracting work. Campbell, the only person in the vehicle, died at the scene, officials said.

**April 28, 2015 - Roswell NM** - Two Southwestern Railroad freight trains collided head-on just after 6 a.m. Tuesday about 10 miles southeast of Roswell, killing one person, injuring another and derailing locomotives and freight cars. Crew member Jesse T. Coburn III, 48, of Texico was pronounced dead at the scene by the Office of the Medical Investigator. The second crew member was transported to Lubbock, Texas for medical treatment and was listed in stable condition. The initial investigation revealed two trains collided when one stationary train positioned northbound on the track was struck head-on by a moving southbound train. The Southwestern Railroad is operated by The Western Group of Ogden, UT.

**April 15 - Omaha NE** - Two employees of a contract company, Nebraska Railcar Cleaning Services, hired by GE Capital Rail Services were killed in an explosion while cleaning out a tanker car near First
and Hickory Streets about 1:10 p.m. The force of the blast blew one man off a tanker car and to the ground, while the ladder shot out of the car and left another man trapped. One of the men was identified as **Dallas Foulk**, 40, who was lying on the ground when first responders arrived. He died after being taken in extremely critical condition to Creighton University Medical Center. The other man’s body was extricated from the tank car by Omaha firefighters about 6 hours after the explosion. He was identified as **Adrian LaPour**, 44.

**Pine Bluff AR - April 3, 2015** - A Pine Bluff man, **Kye Garrett Stewart**, 35, was killed Friday night when he was apparently struck by a train while working on it near Evergreen Packaging on Fairfield Road. He was pronounced dead at the scene by Deputy Coroner Eric Belcher at 10:53 p.m. The cause of death was listed as multiple blunt force trauma and Kelley said the body would be sent to the State Medical Examiner’s Office on Sunday for an autopsy. According to a press release from Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office Maj. Lafayette Woods Jr., witnesses from Evergreen Packaging said Stewart was coupling several train cars when the operator radioed to him and failed to receive a response. The operator got out of the train, which was carrying at least 35 train cars, and walked toward the rear, where he discovered Stewart, who worked for **Grace Railroad Contractors, Inc.**, underneath the wheels of the ninth car.

**KANSAS CITY, KS - July 14, 2014** - A contractor for Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway was killed Monday after he fell into a train car full of grain. The man has been identified as 48-year-old **James Breedlove**. Fire rescue crews responded to the railroad yards near Interstate 635 and Kansas Avenue about 9:30 a.m. Monday. Craig Duke, deputy chief of the Kansas City, KS, Fire Department, said Breedlove fell into the train car during the transfer process of moving the grain to a semi-trailer. When firefighters arrived on the scene, rail crews were in the process of trying to remove the grain from the train car. Crews located Breedlove dead near the bottom of the car. No other injuries were reported.

**June 24, 2014 - Birmingham, AL** - **Caleb Bankston**, a 27-year-old Collinsville man, died midday Tuesday in an accident at the Alabama Warrior Railway in Birmingham. Bankston was a train conductor at the Walter Coke Plant in Birmingham. On Tuesday he and an engineer were backing up a loaded train which consisted of two engines and five hopper cars, according to the Jefferson County Coroner's Office. They were backing the train loaded with coke toward other empty hopper cars, said Deputy Coroner Phillip Russell. Bankston was standing on a small ladder at the right rear of the last hopper car and was in communication with the engineer via a two-way radio. While they were backing up the train, the hopper car Bankston was on derailed, unbeknownst to Bankston and the engineer. The train continued moving and then the car Bankston was on shifted. He was thrown into the side wall of an empty car, and then fell to the ground between parallel tracks. Birmingham Fire and Rescue responded to the site and pronounced Bankston dead on the scene. The accident took place between 11:15 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Bankston was once a contestant on the CBS show Survivor.